

A NEW SPECIES OF COLUBER FROM WESTERN TEXAS.

BY ARTHUR ERWIN BROWN.

On June 18 a large and handsome *Coluber* was received at the Zoological Gardens from Mr. E. Meyenberg, a resident collector of the Society at Pecos, Texas, which both in color and scutellation differs greatly from any species of the genus previously collected in the United States.

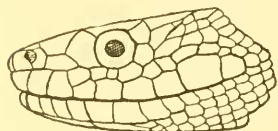
The locality of its capture was given by Mr. Meyenberg as the Davis Mountains, fifty miles southwest of Pecos, near the head of Toyah creek.

As it seemed unlikely that so large and striking a snake could have hitherto escaped notice in a region comparatively well known to collectors, description of the species was withheld and a liberal reward was offered for additional specimens, the fortunate result of which has been the receipt on August 13 of two younger, living snakes from the same locality, presenting similar characters, and a fourth specimen on August 16.

All doubt as to the fixed characters and the place of origin of these snakes being removed, the species is here described:

Coluber subocularis sp. nov. Plate XXIX.

Specific characters: Head broad and flat on top. Body stout. Tail short. Rostral broad and low. A row of small accessory plates below the eye and preocular. Preocular in contact with the frontal. Temporals small and numerous. Scales in 31-35 rows. Anal divided. Body color yellow, with a series of black H-shaped dorsal blotches with pale centres, the lateral arms being continued by a paler shade, and forming a pair of longitudinal stripes. Head and belly unmarked.



Type specimen. No. 13,733 Academy Collection, from the Davis Mountains, Jeff. Davis county, Texas.

In the type specimen, which is adult, the head is broad, flat on top and distinct from the neck, which is rather slender; the body is stout and the tail a little less than one-eighth of the total length.

Rostral nearly twice as broad as high, barely visible from above. Internasals narrow in front, half the length of prefrontals. One pair of prefrontals. Frontal rather broad behind, one-third longer than its greatest breadth, the anterior corners cut off to form an oblique suture with the preocular. Suture between the parietals equals the length of the frontal, or the distance between the frontal and rostral. Two large nasals, the nostril between them, situated high up and directed rather upward. Loreal longer than high, its upper border sloping downward and backward. One large preocular, reaching the frontal. In each of the specimens a row of two or three small accessory plates more or less completely separates the eye, the preocular and the hinder end of the loreal from the labials, but they present variations in detail. The type has 9 upper labials on one side, and there are three accessory plates, the first lying on the 3d and 4th, the second on the 4th and 5th, and the third on the 5th labial; on the other side there are 11 labials, the first accessory lying on the 4th and 5th, the second on the 5th and 6th, and the third on the 6th, the labials being wholly excluded from the orbit on both sides. The largest of the smaller specimens has 10 labials on each side, and the accessory plates are as in the type. In the third specimen there are 11 labials on each side, on one of which only the two anterior accessory plates are present, and the sixth labial enters the orbit behind them; on the other side, the 6th labial also reaches the eye, and all three accessory plates are present, but the two hinder are small and are pushed forward. In the smallest specimen the labials on one side are 10, the first and second accessory plates only are present, permitting the fifth labial to enter the eye; on the other side, the labials are 11, and the three plates completely shut out the labials, as in the type and the second specimen. Three postoculars, the inferior extending forward under the eye. The temporals are small and irregular, from 3 to 5 in the first row. Lower labials 14, the hinder ones small and scale-like. Five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields; the hinder pair shorter and widely separated.

Scales in 33 rows, with two pits; the outer row very slightly enlarged; 27 to 29 rows faintly keeled.

Ventrals 270; anal divided; subcaudals 70 pairs.

Total length 1,590 mm. (tail 190).

Color bright yellowish buff, with an orange tinge anteriorly; head more ashy, without markings on top or sides. Two very distinct black stripes, two or three scales wide, separated by three and two half rows, begin on the neck and run back to the tail, becoming blackish brown posteriorly. At intervals of about eight scales they are connected by narrow crossbars of the same color, the first of which is about three inches behind the head. The stripes are at first jet black, but after a short distance the portion midway between the crossbars fades to maroon, leaving the black sections outlined as a series of H-shaped dorsal blotches, the centres of both the crossbars and the lateral arms being paler. There are 24 of these spots on the body and 8 on the tail, where they lose much of their characteristic shape. On each side is a row of ill-defined, cloudy spots, rather higher than long, extending to the ends of the ventrals; they mostly alternate with the dorsal spots, but an occasional one is opposite. Traces of a short, broken black line on the sides of the neck suggest a second stripe parallel to that on the back. Belly white with a faint yellowish tinge, unmarked, except for a dusky shade on the suture between the subcaudals, and a cloudy spot on the hinder margin of each scutum on the anterior half of the tail. Chin and throat pure white.

The above color description was taken from the type in life, when freshly caught, but much of the intensity has already faded, after two weeks' immersion in spirits.

The largest of the three specimens now living in the Zoological Society's collection measures 915 mm. (tail 125). It has 35 rows of scales, of which about 15 are very faintly keeled. As nearly as it is possible to count them in a living snake, the ventrals are about 240; subcaudals about 77. There are 25 dorsal spots and 8 on the tail, and the body color is paler and more ashy than in the type.

The third specimen is 684 mm. long (tail 98); the scales are in 31 rows, about 13 of which are faintly keeled; ventrals about 245; subcaudals about 68. The color is similar to the last described, but there is a small dusky spot at each of the anterior

and lateral angles of the frontal plate. There is the same number of dorsal spots as in the type.

The fourth example is 472 mm. long (tail 67); scales in 31 rows, of which 15 are keeled; ventrals about 240; subcaudals about 63. The color is very similar to the type, but less intense, and there are but 20 dorsal spots on the body, with 8 on the tail.

In all the young individuals the light portion of the dorsal stripes, continuing the lateral arms of the H-shaped spots, is less distinct than in the adult, and the whole under surface is pearly white, with indications of the cloudy markings under the tail; the carination of the dorsal scales is so indistinct that it is hard to determine its exact extent.

The bright colors and the strong contrasts shown in life by the adults, render this one of the most beautiful of North American snakes. The pattern on the dorsal region is simply the extreme development of the tendency toward longitudinal extension of the corners of the spots, which is shown at times in some other species, such as *C. obsoletus confinis*, which occasionally exhibits even the neck-bands. It is also suggested on the forepart of the body in *C. lineaticollis* Cope, but from these it differs widely in scutellation, and its real relations are with the section of *Coluber* represented by the Mexican *C. triaspis* and *C. mutabilis*, which tend in the direction of the nearly related genus *Pityophis* through *P. vertebralis*, from which, however, it is abundantly distinguished by the generic characters and by the curious fact that the color shading is completely reversed, the spots in *C. subocularis* being black anteriorly and fading toward the tail, while in all species of *Pityophis* the exact opposite occurs.